

From *A Dual Autobiography*, Will & Ariel Durant (Simon and Schuster, 1977)

most part, but a considerable number run around in fine clothes and good shoes, with their heads held high; and the whites are correspondingly prosperous. Good schools, colleges, roads; great office buildings, majestic post offices, stores crowded with shoppers and goods; even books are selling. The war has lifted the South visibly to economic wealth that peace could have brought only after a generation. The reaction after the war may be tragical, but these splendid schools and this spread of new comforts must remain a great stimulus to all who have known them.

About the end of February Ethel arrived from Washington with Jimmy for a long stay, and on March 1 Will sent her a letter of varied advice: "... persuade mother to get a maid, for I don't relish reducing my wife and my daughter to being my servants. Until a maid is secured . . . divide the chores. . . . I'll help with the cleaning. . . . Kiss Jimmy's eyes for me, and kiss mother for me."

From Ogden, Utah, he sent me his own *De Senectute*, and the periodical assurance of his perambulatory chastity:

3-5-45

Your talk about growing old amuses me. . . . Why not grow old? If we increase in stability, wisdom and patience, old age has no terrors, and much attractiveness. . . . I too am aging; this trip, I think, has taken a year out of me. But we're not licked yet! We're going stronger than ever. One night together, and our youth will be restored. . . .

P.S. I have just reread your letter of Feb. 26th. It is beautiful. Don't worry about my everlasting fidelity to you. I have been, and will always be, altogether yours.

A quarter century has passed since that letter. He still talks that way about old age, and I have begun to believe in his fidelity.

We were hardly a month together when we received news that my mother had suffered a severe paralytic stroke. I left at once for New York, anxious to share the problems of this crisis with the rest of the family. I arrived on April 12, the day Franklin Roosevelt died. My mother had lost the use of her limbs, but her voice remained, and she lived for six years more. Will could not accompany me on that trip, for he was now involved in an affair called the "Declaration of Interdependence." But that is a complicated subject, and I leave it to him to explain his sudden relapse into public affairs.

Will:

One day, I believe in April, 1944, a Jew, Meyer (now Michael) David, and a Christian, Dr. Christian Richard, came to me with an unusual request: to suggest some constructive enterprise that could give their social ardor some work and wings. I proposed that they do something to mitigate racial and religious animosity in America. Just as *independence*

had been the motto of states and individuals since 1750, so the motto of the coming generations should be *interdependence*. And just as no state can now survive by its own unaided power, so no democracy can long endure without recognizing and encouraging the interdependence of the racial and religious groups composing it; we need a Declaration of *Interdependence*.

On April 15, 1944, Meyer and Christian issued the following

Introductory Statement
to a

DECLARATION OF INTERDEPENDENCE

Dr. Will Durant, at his Hollywood home, recently, in a conference with Dr. Christian Richard and Mr. Meyer I. David, suggested the desirability of an organized stand for human tolerance. "Write a declaration of interdependence," said Dr. Durant, "and I will sign it."

This idea appealed to them. They worked at it, and presented a draft. . . . The Declaration needed a finishing touch, and Will Durant gave it its final form.

This final form seemed to us a document worthy of Thomas Jefferson himself:

Human progress having reached a high level through respect for the liberty and dignity of men, it has become desirable to re-affirm these evident truths:

That differences of race, color and creed are natural, and that diverse groups, institutions, and ideas are stimulating factors in the development of men;

That to promote harmony in diversity is a responsible task of religion and statesmanship;

That since no individual can express the whole truth, it is essential to treat with understanding and good will those whose views differ from our own;

That by the testimony of history intolerance is the door to violence, brutality, and dictatorship; and

That the realization of human interdependence and solidarity is the best guard of civilization.

Therefore, we solemnly resolve, and invite everyone to join in united action,

To uphold and promote human fellowship through mutual consideration and respect;

To champion human dignity and decency, and to safeguard these without distinction of race or color or creed;

To strive in concert with others to discourage all animosities arising from these differences, and to unite all groups in the fair play of civilized life.

Rooted in freedom, children of the same Divine Father, sharing everywhere a common human blood, we declare again that all men are brothers, and that mutual tolerance is the price of liberty.

The form as we had originally finished it concluded: "Rooted in freedom, bonded in the fellowship of danger," etc. Dr. Everett Clinchy, then president of the National Conference of Christians and Jews, suggested that this should be changed to "Rooted in freedom, children of the same Divine Father . . ." His proposal was submitted to an "executive committee" composed of Mr. David, Dr. Richard, Dr. Stewart P. MacLennan (a prominent clergyman), John Anson Ford (of the Board of Supervisors governing Los Angeles County), Eric Scudder (a leading attorney), Mrs. Althea Warren (county librarian), and nine others, including myself. The proposal was accepted, and the Declaration was sent out over America, with a request for signatures and contributions. We received signatures from Curtis Bok, Theodore Dreiser, Arthur Garfield Hays, Herbert Hoover, Thomas Mann, Rabbis Edgar Magnin and Max Nussbaum, my former teachers Robert S. Woodworth and William Pepperill Montague, Princess Laura Orsini, Professors Edward A. Ross and Pitirim Sorokin, M. Lincoln (Max) Schuster, David O. Selznick, Upton Sinclair, Senator Elbert Thomas, John Haynes Holmes, and many more.

Emboldened by the response, we engaged the ballroom of the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel for an "inaugural dinner," and Thomas Mann, Theodore Dreiser, and Miss Bette Davis agreed to address the gathering. My letters from Los Angeles to Ariel (in New York) noted the progress of our preparation.

4-17-45

. . . On Saturday a lady called up and protested at our having Dreiser on the program, on the ground that he (she said) is an extreme Communist, and that he had attacked Roosevelt bitterly . . . for getting us into the war. She vowed that she'd never step into the same room with Theodore. A few minutes later Mrs. Dreiser called up, and said Theodore had learned that Herbert Hoover was a member of our organization, and that he was unwilling to have anything to do with a movement in which Hoover was in any way involved. I told Dreiser that Hoover had signed, and that I had invited Hoover to speak for us; but I talked Dreiser out of quitting on us. This human comedy is funny indeed.

11-20-45

It's a big blow to me that you can't be by my side at the dinner day after tomorrow . . . ; we have 100 reservations beyond what we can place. . . . The hotel has agreed to squeeze 425 diners into its California Room, though it contracted only for 400. Ethel and many others have been working heroically to prepare everything.

On April 22 the first dinner of "The Declaration of Interdependence" went off well enough, with a hitch now and then. Thomas Mann delivered in his quiet way a philosophical discourse—on the struggle between liberty and equality—which went to the roots of our conflicting ideolo-

gies, American and Russian. Bette Davis not only spoke with her usual incisiveness, but took over from my bungling hands the unpleasant task of appealing for funds. The result encouraged us, and we rashly threw ourselves into an exciting campaign to capture all Los Angeles for brotherhood by staging a complex program in the Hollywood Bowl for the afternoon of July Fourth.

Ethel had to return now to her husband in Washington. Ariel returned to her husband in Los Angeles, and was soon absorbed in our make-or-break enterprise. I was diverted for a day (May 3) into a debate for a *Town Meeting of the Air* in Philharmonic Auditorium on "Is War Impairing Our Moral Standards?" A prominent clergyman, J. Herbert Smith, and an alluring actress, Irene Dunne, took the affirmative. Eddie Cantor answered them with an astonishing display of good nature and extempore wit. My own discourse amplified a now commonplace idea: "We are not losing our moral standards. We are merely adjusting them to the changed conditions of an industrial society. Our moral code changed when we passed from the hunting stage to agriculture, involving a change, for example, from polygamy to monogamy. We must expect some similar adjustment in passing from agriculture to industry," etc. I think now that the courteous clergyman and the fair Irene had the better of the argument: it seems undeniable that war did impair even our basic moral standards in America. It is continuing to do so at this moment (1970), for war abrogates morals, and does not restore them when peace comes to soldiers trained to kill and to civilians hardened to casualties and blood. Three months after our amiable debate some of our bravest Americans, following orders, killed, at Hiroshima, 130,000 men, women, and children with one bomb.

While various members of our Declaration committee proceeded to make arrangements for the big affair at the Bowl, I was assigned the task of getting speakers. Risking a good part of our funds, I wired Frank Murphy, Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, offering him a thousand dollars and expenses if he would make the principal address for us on the Fourth. He wired back: "I will come, and for nothing." Here was another saving remnant in Gomorrha.

With the most prominent lay Catholic in America as our star, I went to another Catholic, Federal Judge J. F. T. O'Connor, a leading jurist in Los Angeles, and persuaded him to ask Archbishop John J. Cantwell to offer the invocation. Fortunately that genial prelate had never heard of me; he consented. Judge O'Connor brought me to Mayor Fletcher Bowron, who agreed to contribute an address of welcome—if I would write it for him. Then one of our most distinguished members, John Anson Ford, arranged for the participation of the Los Angeles Symphonic Band. I conceived the idea of getting a Catholic, a Protestant, a Jewish, and a Negro choir to provide choral music, first separately and then, symbolically,

together. This involved a month of running around, coaxing, bribing; finally they were all organized and committed.

Justice Murphy arrived on July 2; our board of directors went to Union Station to meet his train, and my head grew as I saw that he had a copy of *Caesar and Christ* in his hand. He was full of questions about the book, and proposed to thrash them out with me at the first opportunity. Ariel had arranged a reception for him at our home for that afternoon. Ethel, who had just come back to visit us with Jimmy, helped with mind and will to meet one problem after another. Looking back upon that affair, I can hardly understand how we found room for the 150 guests that the press calculated as having been present. We made matters worse by scattering half a hundred chairs over the lawn; as most of the people preferred to move about, the chairs proved to be a hindrance. One group gathered around Leopold Stokowski, who fascinated us with his white mane and fluid hands. Then most of us crowded into the house, for Justice Murphy responded to persistent requests by making an extempore speech, using our kitchen sink as a podium.

We continued to the end the fight to get a good crowd into the Bowl. Ariel asked Chet Huntley to allow her a few minutes on his daily newscast over local radio station KNX; he welcomed her (July 3), and she explained our purposes and plans to the satisfaction of at least one auditor, for Chet added his warm appeal in support. The next morning, July Fourth, I made the main address at a meeting of the prestigious Breakfast Club, and may have won an additional customer for our event.

When Ariel, Ethel, and I reached the Bowl that afternoon I was near the end of my physiological rope, but the sight of those eighteen thousand people—Catholics, Protestants, Jews, agnostics, Negroes, Mexican-Americans—each with a copy of our Declaration in his hands, restored me. The program was complicated, but it went off well. A unique musical prelude was provided by the Jewish choir under the lead of Cantor Leib Glantz, the Catholic choir under Roger Wagner (who was just beginning a generation of high service to music in Los Angeles), the Protestant choir under Halsted McCormack, and the Negro choir directed by Lavenia Nash. John Burton introduced Archbishop Cantwell and then Mayor Bowron. Judge O'Connor presented Justice Murphy, and we heard a stirring address on the horrors of racial hostility in Nazi Germany and the need of guarding ourselves from similar savagery here by developing racial and religious amity. When the applause subsided I asked the audience to recite the Declaration of Interdependence with me, sentence by sentence, as a solemn pledge taken before a justice of the Supreme Court. It was done, and many persons who had not attended told me later how moved they had been by hearing those words thundering over the air. Then Rabbi Magnin spoke eloquently for his people, Señora Consuelo de Bonza for the Mexican Community, Dr. Harold

Kingsley for the blacks. Robert Young recited well a one-act play, which described the fellowship of Catholic, Protestant, Negro, and Jewish American soldiers in danger and death. The four choirs united symbolically to sing "America the Beautiful." Choirs and audience together sang a stanza of "America." Dr. E. C. Farnham, executive secretary of the (Protestant) Church Federation of Los Angeles, gave the parting benediction. I thanked the speakers, thanked and dismissed the audience, and marched, with the rest, from the stage, uttering a Te Deum "to the unknown god" who might have heard with benevolent doubt our announcement that all men are brothers.

We had recklessly promised our friends in or near Lake Hill to spend some summers there and help carry on our discussion club. So we entrained on July 12 for Chicago, dined there with Dr. Zurawski, renewed old acquaintances in New York, and motored up to our mountain home.

Ariel's mother and sisters were already there; Mary was classifying material for *The Age of Faith*. Soon Ethel came with Jim, and Ethel became my favorite typist and stern editor. Jim, aged four, astonished me with theology. One day that summer, as I rocked on the porch, holding him close on my knees, face to face, and perhaps because he felt me press him fondly, he said, solemnly, "Popsy, even when you're dead you'll remember how much you loved me." So this precious Lord of Misrule, as I called him, was already learned in eschatology. His remark, soon noted and now faithfully quoted, set all of us wondering; none of us could remember talking to Jim about death, much less about life after death. In other respects Jim was not so abnormally learned. Ariel used to lull him to sleep with stories that she invented on the spur of the moment about an adventurous character whom she named "Woe-is-me." Four years later, recalling those bright inventions, Jim asked Ariel, "Was Woe-is-me real?"

After two happy months with loved ones who spoiled me more than I spoiled Jim, I set out in two and a half months and forty-seven lectures to replenish the exchequer. One letter will suffice for this tour:

Omaha, 11-19-45

I've been leading the pace that kills. For example, I spoke on the radio at 1:30 P.M. yesterday in Chicago; dined with Dr. Zurawski at 2:30; took a train at 5:15 to Winnetka; suffered a reception at 6 P.M. in the home of the town banker; lectured at eight; got to bed at eleven. . . .

I reached Chicago 8 A.M., fought for a taxi, rushed ten miles to the airport, and was told that the flight was postponed by bad weather. Picture me waiting and fretting till noon; surrounded by sweating, dripping people whose planes were also grounded; and wondering whether I would ever get to Omaha. At last the skies cleared; then our plane developed engine trouble; . . . finally we sailed off and up at 12:15 into and over the

A Dual

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

by

Will and Ariel Durant

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